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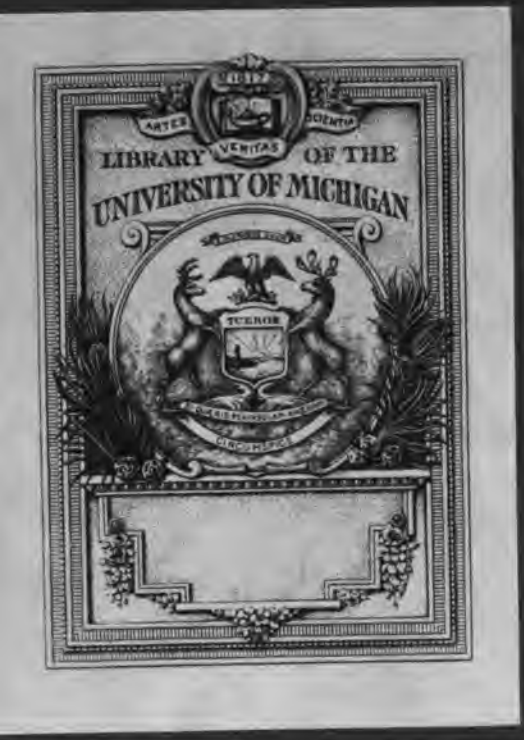

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INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF AMERICAN REPUBLICS
JOHN BARRETT, DIRECTOR
FRANCISCO J. YÁNES, SECRETARY

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1909

VENEZUELA

GENERAL DESCRIPTIVE DATA
PREPARED IN JUNE
1909

WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
1909

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VENEZUELA

The United States of Venezuela occupy the northernmost part of the South American continent, stretching in a northwesterly direction along the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea and bounded on the land side by Colombia, Brazil, and British Guiana. The country has an area of 593,950 square miles, equal to the combined area of the States of Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama, with sufficient space left for several States the size of Rhode Island. Over this vast area there is distributed a population of 2,644,298, Venezuela being one of the most sparsely populated countries in South America.

Venezuela may be geographically divided into three distinct zones, viz: The extensive plains and river valleys, known as the *llanos*, affording excellent pasturage for numerous herds of cattle; the mountain section, formed by the three mountain ranges; and the dry and healthful table-lands or plateaus.

This variety of physical features produces an equal variety of climate, products, and soil. Coffee, cacao, tobacco, and sugar cane are largely grown and exported, and wheat and other cereals thrive, but are mostly used for home consumption. The slopes of the mountains are heavily wooded and contain quantities of timber and many useful medicinal plants, among them *divi-divi* (*Cæsalpinia coriaria*), the pods furnishing an excellent material for tanning; *Maclura tinctorea*, producing fustic and yielding an excellent yellow dye; *Indigofera anil* and *Indigofera tinctorea*, yielding indigo; *Castilloa elástica* and *Hevea brasilensis*, yielding rubber, and numerous cabinet and other useful woods. The mines produce precious and useful metals, gold, silver, copper, and lead, the various asphalt lakes yield the best qualities of asphaltum, and along the coast pearls are found at different points. The principal exports of Venezuela are hides and skins, live cattle, coffee, and cacao.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

The Venezuelan coast was first sighted by COLUMBUS on August 1, 1498, on his third voyage, and was successively explored by ALONSO DE OJEDA, ALONSO NIÑO, and others. The country at that time was

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inhabited by no less than 150 tribes of Indians, speaking 11 different languages and 150 dialects, among which the Caribs and Teques were the most warlike and savage. They succeeded for many years in preventing the permanent settlement of the country, and it was here that the Spaniards encountered more difficulty and fiercer resistance from the aborigines than anywhere else in America.

In 1527, the King of Spain granted the Province of Venezuela to the BELZARES family, who dispatched AMBROSIO DE ALFINGER to bring it under subjection. ALFINGER and his successors did not, however, succeed in establishing Spanish authority beyond the coast strip, and it was not until the year 1545, when the Spanish Crown dispatched JUAN DE CARVAJAL and annulled the concession of the BELZARES family, that any permanent settlement in the interior was effected. The Spanish dominion was then gradually extended over the whole country, the Indians being enslaved wherever this was possible and treated with the utmost cruelty. This led to numerous rebellions, the Indians of Venezuela not being of the pacific, submissive character of those of Peru and other countries.

The British, French, and Dutch buccaneers added to the difficulties of the Spanish authorities by frequent attacks on the coast towns.

In 1718 the viceroyalty of New Granada was created and the territory of what is now Venezuela passed under the jurisdiction of the Viceroy at Bogota.

The first movement for independence was initiated in Venezuela as early as the year 1797 by the patriots GAUL and ESPAÑA, but, like many others which were to follow, it failed, the initiators being condemned either to death or banishment. Gen. FRANCISCO MIRANDA'S various efforts to free the country from the Spanish yoke likewise failed. In the year 1810 the citizens of Caracas rose against the Spanish authorities, and on the 19th of April deposed the Spanish Governor, Don VICENTE EMPARÁN. A Constitutional Congress met on March 2, 1811, and on July 5 of the same year formally declared the independence of the United Provinces of Venezuela. The war of this first revolution lasted until 1812, when MIRANDA was defeated by the Spanish troops and Spanish authority again reestablished. In the year following SIMÓN BOLIVAR took up arms against the Spanish authorities and war was waged with varying success until BOLIVAR defeated the Royalists at the battle of Boyaca on August 7, 1819. This defeat ended the Spanish dominion in northern South America, the Viceroy, SÁMANO, fleeing from Bogota shortly after Boyaca.

On December 17, 1819, Venezuela became a part of BOLIVAR'S Greater Colombia, and upon the disruption of the Federation, Venezuela declared its secession and absolute independence on September 22, 1830.

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Gen. José Paez was elected the first President of the Republic. Under succeeding Presidents several attempts were made to change the form of government, and on February 20, 1859, by vote of a majority of its citizens Venezuela declared itself in favor of a Federal Republic, which form of government was finally and definitely adopted. The present Constitution of Venezuela was promulgated April 27, 1904.

Gen. Juan Vicente Gomez, the present incumbent of the Presidency, assumed the office in 1908, upon the retirement of Gen. Cipriano Castro. His term of office will expire May 22, 1911.

CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT.

Venezuela, officially termed The United States of Venezuela, is one of the five federal unions of America, having adopted the federal, representative, republican form of government, the various States being entirely autonomous in their internal government with certain limited powers only vested in the Federal Government.

SR. GENERAL J. VICENTE GOMEZ, PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA.

Legislative power is vested in the National Congress, composed of two chambers, the Senate and the House of Deputies. The members of the former are elected by the legislatures of the States, two Senators to represent each State, for a term of six years. Deputies are elected by direct vote for a term of six years, every citizen over 21 years of age being entitled to vote.

The President and two Vice-Presidents are elected for a term of six years by an electoral body chosen by the people for that purpose. They may not be reelected for another consecutive term.

A Cabinet of seven Ministers or Secretaries of State assists the President in the administration of the Government. The Cabinet is appointed by the President and is responsible to him alone.

The Federal judiciary comprises a National Supreme Court, several courts of appeals, and a number of minor courts. The justices of the Supreme Court, seven in number, are elected by the National Congress for a term of seven years.

INTERIOR GOVERNMENT.

Thirteen States, five Territories, and a Federal District comprise the United States of Venezuela, the States electing their own executive, legislative, and judicial authorities. The Territories are administered by a Governor appointed by the President of the Republic, as is also the Federal District, the Governor of the latter having, however, a Municipal Council, elected by the people, to assist him.

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The States and Territories with their respective capitals are:

State of—	Capital.
Aragua	La Victoria.
Bermudez	Cumana.
Bolivar	Ciudad Bolivar.
Carabobo	Valencia.
Falcon	Coro.
Guarico	Calabozo.
Lara	Barquisimeto.
Merida	Merida.
Miranda	Ocumare.
Tachira	San Cristobal.
Trujillo	Trujillo.
Zamora	San Carlos.
Zulia	Maracaibo.
Territory of—	
Amazonas	San Fernando de Atabapo.
Colon	Gran Roque.
Cristobal Colon	Cristobal Colon.
Delta Amacuro	San Jose de Amacuro.
Yuruari	Guacipati.

The Federal District comprises the city of Caracas, the capital of the Republic.

President	Gen. JUAN VICENTE GOMEZ.
Minister of the Interior	Gen. FRANCISCO LINARES ALCÁNTARA.
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Dr. FRANCISCO GONZALEZ GUINÁN.
Minister of the Treasury and Public Credit	Dr. JESUS MUÑOZ TEBAR.
Minister of War and Marine	Gen. M. V. CASTRO ZAVALA.
Minister of Fomento	Gen. RAFAEL MARCÍA CARABAÑO.
Minister of Public works	Dr. ROBERTO VARGAS.
Minister of Public Instruction	Dr. SAMUEL DARÍO MALDONADO.

The salary of the President is $12,000 per annum.

VENEZUELA IN 1908.

During 1908 the presidential office in Venezuela was transferred from Gen. CIPRIANO CASTRO to President JUAN VICENTE GOMEZ, who had previously held the office of Vice-President.

Despite certain internal disturbances, the country faithfully discharged its obligations to the bondholders under the financial arrangement of 1905 and effected the payment of the various claims of the Powers under the protocol of 1903. The payments on account of the foreign debt during the last six months of 1908 aggregated $564,000.

Numerous decrees recently issued provide for conditions whereby certain restrictions on trade and industry throughout the Republic are removed and distribution made of certain moneys for public expenditure in different States. In May, 1909, the export duties on coffee, cacao, and hides were removed, and during 1908 such modifica-

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BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF CENTRAL PART OF MARACAIBO, VENEZUELA.

The city was founded in 1529, and is one of the most important ports of the Republic. It is situated on the western shore of Lake Maracaibo, about 22 miles from the sea.

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tions were made in the tariff law of January of that year as national exigencies demanded.

A commission has been appointed charged with the revision of the legal code of the Republic, and commerce with the neighboring countries is being developed through the repealing of fluvial regulations, which have been found detrimental to transit trade.

The cable service with Europe was resumed under the contract with the French company made in May, 1909, and an arbitration treaty with Brazil has been signed, to become effective upon the exchange of ratifications by the two Governments.

The relations of the States of the Republic among themselves and with the National Government continue most cordial, and the decree of January 26, 1909, repealing the decree of August 2, 1907, has contributed to the further strengthening of these bonds.

FOREIGN RELATIONS.

Friendly relations have been renewed with Holland, from which country a confidential agent has been accredited near the Government of Venezuela and a protocol concluded on April 19, 1909.

The United States of North America, after having closed its legation in Caracas, subsequently sent a Peace Commissioner to Venezuela, and the result of his negotiations was the protocols of February 13, 1909, and the reestablishment of the legations of both countries in their respective capitals.

Colombia has also accredited a special representative, and negotiations are being made for the celebration of a treaty of navigation, boundary, and commerce.

The friendly and equitable adjustment of the differences with France and the favorable progress of the negotiations with the representative of that country give rise to the hope that in a short time the two nations will resume most cordial and reciprocal relations.

Relations with Germany are being strengthened, as is shown by the kind reception given by the Emperor to the special mission recently accredited to that country, and the pact of amity, commerce, and navigation made on January 28, 1909.

The acceptance of the arbitral decision of the claim of the Caracas Water Company removed all differences existing between that country and Belgium.

The protocols of December 9, 1905, concerning the boundary with Brazil, have been approved by the Brazilian Congress, but the exchange of ratifications has not yet been made.

The first general arbitration convention celebrated with a neighboring State is that made with Brazil in Caracas on April 30, 1909.

Venezuela was represented in the Second Peace Conference of The Hague, and a number of pacts were subscribed to by her delegates to that conference.

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FINANCE.

In July, 1907, Venezuela's obligation to Great Britain, Germany, and Italy, by virtue of the protocols of Washington, was canceled, the total sum paid having aggregated $3,567,000.

Since August, 1907, Venezuela has paid to the countries not enjoying preferential treatment 30 per cent of the customs receipts of La Guaira and Puerto Cabello, amounting to, up to May 1, 1909, $1,199,148.

The financial obligations of the Republic and the agreements made by the Government have been strictly complied with. During the fiscal years 1907 and 1908, the expenditures of the Government on account of these obligations amounted to $3,904,000, and from January 1 to March 31, 1909, $484,000, or a total outlay of $4,388,000, all of which, in accordance with the protocols of Washington, went to the foreign powers, the 3 per cent diplomatic debt of 1905, the debt contracted on account of diplomatic agreements, and the nonamortized diplomatic agreement debt. The payments on account of the internal debt from January 1, 1907, to March 31, 1909, amounted to $1,216,703.

The outstanding internal 3 per cent debt on March 31, 1909, was $12,040,000, and the outstanding external debt on the same date was $26,253,000, or a total of $38,293,000.

COMMERCE.

Based upon the published returns of the trade of the Republic for the first half of the fiscal year 1907–8, the commercial transactions for the twelve months show approximately the same total as in the preceding year when an aggregate of $26,540,905 was reported.

A trade estimate places import values at $9,000,000 and exports at $17,000,000, though the latter values were probably somewhat smaller. The principal receiving countries were the United States, $5,550,073; France, $5,496,627; Great Britain, $1,447,784; Germany, $908,260; the Netherlands, $763,642; Cuba, $604,102; and Spain, $589,560.

United States statistics note receipts of Venezuelan merchandise during the calendar year 1908 to the value of $7,028,180 and shipments to the Republic to the amount of $2,566,022, the values being practically the same as in the preceding twelve months.

The commerce of the country for the first half of the fiscal year 1907–8 consisted of exports valued at $8,613,000 and imports, $4,984,000. Imports were received as follows: From Great Britain, $1,804,000; United States, $1,256,000; Germany, $823,800, and the Netherlands, $462,400. Shipments were made to France, $3,409,000; United States, $3,097,000; Great Britain, $622,000; Germany, $485,000; the Netherlands, $365,000; and Spain, $325,000.

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The principal exports for the period were: Coffee, 58,489,200 pounds; cacao, 22,598,021 pounds; divi-divi, 8,714,255 pounds; cattle and asphalt. Rubber shipments aggregated 869,591 pounds, and ox-hides and goatskins together, 2,481,298 pounds.

PRODUCTION AND INDUSTRIES.

The exploitation of native products forms the basis of Venezuela's industrial life. The area under coffee is estimated at about 200,000 acres, the number of estates being over 33,000, and the product in 1907, 42,806 tons. Cacao growers operate 5,000 estates, 14,000 tons being exported, and sugar planters about 11,000, the annual production being about 3,000 tons. Cotton is grown in exportable quantities and the forest regions abound in rubber and fine timber. A contract for the exploitation of the forests of the Orinoco Delta has been approved by the Government and concessions covering the Rio Negro and El Caura rubber sections contain special stipulations against the willful destruction of the trees. The cultivation and manufacture of tobacco is an important branch of industrial life, and rice-growing is made the subject of special bounties in certain States.

New enterprises are covered by recently granted concessions for the culture of fiber plants and the development of the textile industry, also for linseed oil factories, paper mills, and cement works.

The live stock of the country is estimated at over 6,000,000 head, including 2,000 oxen, 1,600,000 goats, and 1,600,000 pigs.

The country is rich in minerals; gold, copper, silver, iron, and salt being profitably mined. Asphalt is exported to the United States in large quantities.

The coal output in 1906 was over 14,000 tons, and newly discovered deposits in the States of Zulia and Marida are exploited under a concession granted in April, 1908, 20 per cent of the profits being paid to the Government. Salt is a government monopoly, the mines being operated, in accordance with the decree of January 27, 1909, by agents of the Federal Government. The yearly rental is $700,000.

The threatened extinction of the pearl beds on account of over exploitation has necessitated the repeal, for an indefinite time, of the pearl-fishery concession and the prohibition of oyster fishing.

COMMUNICATION FACILITIES.

The total length of railways in operation in the Republic is about 540 miles. The number of lines, according to latest information, was 12, with an invested capital of over $40,000,000. Receipts for the first half of 1908 were about $800,000 and expenditures $600,000. In connection with the lines there have been constructed 716 bridges and 109 tunnels.

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A SECTION OF THE IMATACA IRON REGION ON THE LOWER ORINOCO, VENEZUELA.

Contains an almost inexhaustible quantity of magnetic Bessemer ore, assaying 80 per cent of pure metal, exposed to view and accessible by water transport.

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The Central Railway Company of Venezuela continues the laying of its tracks toward Santa Lucia, notwithstanding the fact that the questions between the company and the Government have not yet been settled.

With its favorable geographical position on the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and with a coast line of more than 2,000 miles, Venezuela possesses no less than 50 bays and 32 ports, the most important of which are La Guaira, the principal port and commercial center, Puerto Cabello, Guanta, and Cumana, at which ocean-going vessels call regularly. Ciudad Bolivar, on the Orinoco River, 373 miles inland, and Maracaibo, on Lake Maracaibo, are the most important inland ports of Venezuela.

The Atlas Line, the Royal Dutch West India Line, and the Red D Line maintain a regular service between New York and Venezuelan ports, the Atlas Line calling at La Guaira and Puerto Cabello, the Royal Dutch West India Line at Puerto Cabello, La Guaira, Guanta, Cumana, Carupano, and Margarita Island, and the Red D Line at La Guaira, Puerto Cabello, and Maracaibo. These steamers take from seven to nine days to make the trip from New York to Venezuelan ports, first-class passage being $60 to $75.

The waterways of Venezuela form important means of communication and transportation, there being no less than 70 navigable rivers in the country, with a total navigable length of over 6,000 miles, of which the mighty Orinoco, the third largest river in South America, with its tributaries, furnishes nearly 4,000 miles. The more important of the other navigable rivers are the Meta, the Apure, the Portuguesa, and the Yaracuy, all of which are navigated by steamships for considerable distances. The Catatumbo River flows into Lake Maracaibo, and is navigable for small steamers, while the majority of the other rivers are navigable for steam launches and flat-bottom boats only.

A regular steamship service is maintained on the Orinoco, Apure, and Portuguesa between Ciudad Bolivar, the principal port on the Orinoco and the interior, as well as points along the coast. Ocean-going vessels enter Lake Maracaibo, which covers an area of 8,000 square miles and is navigable in its entirety. Lake Maracaibo is connected with the Gulf of Venezuela and the Caribbean Sea by means of a strait 34 miles in length and from 5 to 9 miles wide. Numerous other lakes are found throughout the country, Lake Valencia being the most important of these, owing to its favorable situation between Puerto Cabello and La Guaira and Caracas. It is navigated by small steamers.

The Escalante River has been opened to free navigation.

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LA GUAIRA AND CARACAS RAILWAY, VENEZUELA.

This line carries all of the traffic between Caracas, the capital, and its principal port, La Guaira. The railroad climbs from the coast to 3,135 feet above sea level.

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Steamships are engaged in the coastwise trade along the coast of Venezuela, and call regularly at the islands of Margarita, Curacao, and Trinidad.

The capital of the Republic, Caracas, can be reached either from La Guaira or Puerto Cabello, with both of which it is connected by rail, the former being but 22 miles from Caracas.

POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS.

From the close of 1907 to March 31, 1909, 14 new post-offices were established in the Republic, and 21 discontinued post-offices reestablished. The cost of the maintenance of the post-offices from 1907 to March 31, 1909, was $138,000. The expense of transporting the mails during the same period was $237,000. The Red D Line has reduced the charge for the transportation of the mails, and important changes have been made in the rules governing the importations of postal parcels.

Ten new telegraph offices were opened during the fifteen months, four new telegraph lines constructed, and two lines are in process of construction. The receipts from the telegraph service from 1907 to March, 1909, were $148,000.

The dispute with the French Submarine Cable Company has been settled, the Government acquiring the coastwise cable system and a reduction in the rates.

The telegraph system comprises an extent of 4,552 miles with 161 offices. During the first six months of 1908 the Government extended the system by 26 miles, repaired 735 miles, and rebuilt 556 miles of wires. At Willemstad, on the island of Curaçao, the Netherlands Government has established a wireless station with a range of 300 miles, open for government and public business. This station is to be connected with projected establishments in Venezuela.

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

In December, 1908, the number of public schools in the Republic was 716, which number was increased, by virtue of a decree of February 23, 1909, to 1,019. Recently, new school buildings have been constructed, old ones repaired, and plans have been made for the establishment of agricultural, veterinary, mining, and commercial colleges. Reforms and improvements have been made in the universities of the Republic, the Institute of Fine Arts, and in the normal schools. The total number of federal, municipal, and private primary schools in the country is 1,525, of secondary instruction 88, and of higher instruction 2—the University of Caracas and the University of Los Andes.

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BOLIVAR SQUARE, VALENCIA, VENEZUELA.

Valencia, the capital of the State of Carabobo, Venezuela, is 24 miles from Puerto Cabello on the Caribbean Sea and 2 miles from Lake Valencia. The memorable battle of Carabobo, in which General Simon Bolivar was the central figure, and which ended monarchical power on the northern coast of South America, was fought near the lake on June 24, 1821.

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